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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

THE MAKING OF A TILE:



FOR years the village of Menlo Park, New Jersey, has been known to fame as the home of Edison, "the King of Light," as the enthusiastic Frenchmen have dubbed him. But Mr. Edison has removed his plant, and in future the place will be known principally as the seat of the Menlo Park Ceramic Co., manufacturers of Volkmar tile and terra cotta.

As a reminder, however, of the man who first brought the town out of obscurity, the Ceramic Company will soon erect on an elevated plateau, near their factory, ceded by the Pennsylvania Railroad, a statue of Edison, which will be easily seen by passengers on the trains.

The works of the Ceramic Company, which were destroyed by fire on the occasion of their first firing in February last, have been rebuilt from the foundation, and are the finest of the kind in the country, as might be expected from the reputation of the President, Mr. Jere. Smith, who is known to New Yorkers as the builder of the Equitable Life Ins. Co., the Post Office foundation and other prominent edifices.

Mr. Charles Volkmar, an artist whose paintings have won commendation in the Paris Salon, years ago discovered that the way to learn anything in France was to become part of the work itself. He donned the blouse and joined the ranks of the *ouvriers* first at Fontainebleau and later at Limoges, receiving his wages every Saturday night like his fellows. It is needless to say, therefore, that there is very little he does not know about the business in which he has already won a wide reputation in the United States.

At Menlo Park tiles of every kind for wall decoration are made, together with terra cotta of a peculiar kind, and vases and similar articles for use in architecture. All the clay used—a pale blue which fires white—comes from a spot within a mile and a half of the factory, a private spur of the railroad bringing it, as well as coal and other supplies, to the very doors. There it starts on its way to become a thing of beauty. On the ground floor is the slip house, where the clay, together with feldspar, flint and other ingredients, is ground by heavy machinery, mixed with water in an agitator, pumped in a fluid state to a press, where the water is extracted. It is then dried by steam, and when dry, ground to a fine powder, dampened again in long plaster troughs sufficiently to give it adhesiveness, when it is moulded by heavy presses in copper dies. For single pieces to complete any scheme of ornament, plaster of Paris moulds are used. Thence the tiles go to the dry-room, where laid on plaster boards for the absorption of moisture they are allowed to remain from two weeks to a month. They must be perfectly dry, as the presence of any moisture during firing would split them into pieces.

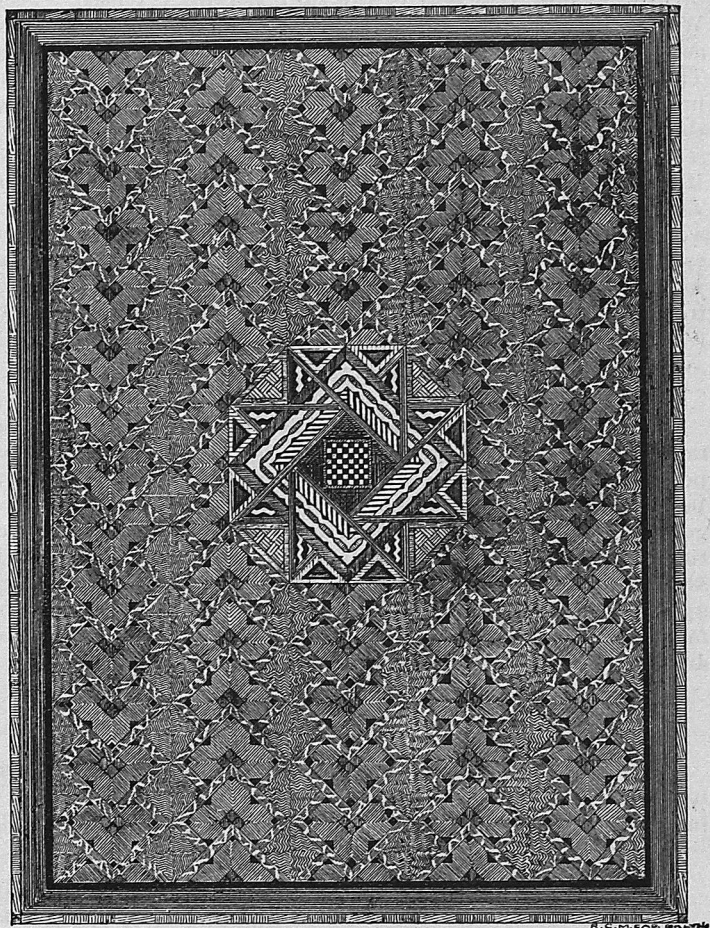
In the kiln-room they are placed in fire clay "saggars" or boxes, the interstices being filled with granulated flint in order to keep them separate and in an upright position to prevent twisting by the heat. After three days of firing, they are allowed to cool for from three to five days, are examined carefully, and the bad ones sorted out. Even under most skillful management there are always plenty of these.

In the painting rooms color is applied. The Volkmar tiles are what are known as underglazed—that is, the color is first put on and the glaze laid upon it—the reverse of ordinary china painting. The color is of course mineral, and is mixed with water and gum.

In the gloss kiln which is their next stopping place, they are fired in a horizontal position in order to keep the glaze even and prevent its flowing to the edges. A day and night of heat and a couple of days to cool off, and they are finished. A careful examination follows in order to detect the "crazy" ones that

is those in which the glaze has crazed or cracked which are cast aside.

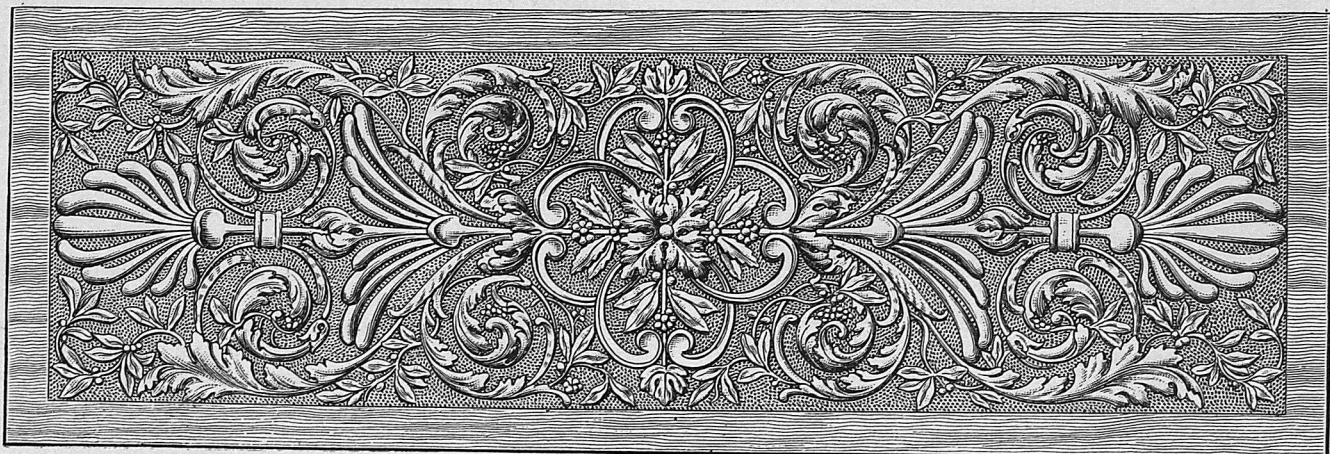
The terra cotta work is different. The same clay is used, but as it comes from the clay press with most of the water extracted, and not redampened, though still in a plastic state. In a large room, lighted on all sides and from above, skillful artists are moulding the designs in the ordinary modeling clay of the



sculptor. From these casts are made of plaster into which the clay is pressed, and each piece afterwards retouched by hand. They are then fired in a regular kiln, this time however without the use of "saggars," but resting on large fire-clay blocks. The fire instead of going up through the kiln, as in the case of the tiles, goes all around the inside of the wall. It is thus prevented from touching the work which would be discolored.

It should be remembered that the terra cotta made here fires white. Various schemes of treatment are employed, as for example an old gold background with ivory white relief. Gold can also be put on in spots to give tone. The process of glazing is the same as in the tiles, in fact it is not unlike that employed in Della Robbia ware, all colors being possible of application. A large frieze and ceiling in Faience is now being made for the loggia of Rockwood Hall, the magnificent summer residence which Messrs. Carrere & Hastings are building, on the Hudson, for Mr. Wm. Rockefeller. The walls of the Fulton and Market National Bank, one of the handsomest banking rooms in the city, are covered with Volkmar tiles.

In this factory are beautifully lighted rooms for designers, a potter with his wheel for turning vases, etc., for decorative uses, and in a special apartment, to which there is but one key, Mr. Volkmar grinds and mixes his own colors and keeps his own secrets. Every appliance known to the art is to be found here, and everything is of the most perfect and substantial character.



PANEL IN SPURR'S VENEER.